



**United States Department of Justice
United States Attorney's Office
District of Minnesota**

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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Four men charged with conspiracy to distribute cocaine, methamphetamine

Four men were each charged April 22 in federal court with one count of conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute 500 or more grams of cocaine and 500 or more grams of methamphetamine. The defendants are Jesus Gutierrez-Cortez, 34, Minneapolis, Santos Mercado-Contreras (aka Miguel Aguilar), 34, Yakima, Wash., Arturo Rodriguez-Hernandez, 41, unknown address, and Jose Rodriguez-Lopez (aka Felix Rosas-Hernandez), 38, unknown address.

Their indictment alleges that on April 1, 2008, they knowingly and intentionally conspired with each other and others to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute 500 or more grams of a substance containing a detectable amount of cocaine and 500 or more grams of a substance containing a detectable amount of methamphetamine.

According to a United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) affidavit, authorities began investigating Gutierrez-Cortez on March 31 after learning he had received a large shipment of cocaine and was willing to sell it.

Authorities arranged a "controlled purchase" with Gutierrez-Cortez on April 1 in a St. Paul parking lot. Gutierrez-Cortez said he needed to go get the cocaine from a St. Paul apartment complex. Investigators followed Gutierrez-Cortez to the complex, and observed him meeting with Mercado-Contreras in the complex's parking lot. They watched Mercado-Contreras enter the apartment building and return carrying an object wrapped in plastic grocery bag. All four men entered a van and drove back to the first parking lot.

There Rodriguez-Lopez suggested meeting later at a park, and investigators saw Gutierrez-Cortez and Rodriguez-Lopez leave the area on foot, while Mercado-Contreras and Rodriguez-Hernandez left in the van. Police stopped the van and seized a brick of cocaine wrapped in a red towel. All four men were arrested.

Authorities executed a search warrant at the apartment believed to have been the one

entered by Mercado-Contreras to obtain the drugs. Police recovered approximately 3,143 grams of methamphetamine.

If convicted, all four men face a potential maximum penalty of life in prison. All sentences are determined by a federal district court judge. This case is the result of an investigation by ICE, the Minnesota Gang Strike Force, the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office and the St. Paul Police Department. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas M. Hollenhorst.

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An indictment is a determination by a grand jury that there is probable cause to believe that offenses have been committed by the defendant. The defendant, of course, is presumed innocent until he or she pleads guilty or is proven guilty at trial.